

Describe your proposed project (Maximum 1000 words)

‘Chiasma’

Chiasma: A decussation or intersection, esp. that of the optic nerves: to divide in the form of an X – to cross in such a form: to cross, intersect, as lines, etc.

Project Summary

Chiasma is a collaborative project between two arts organizations: Folly (UK) and Grunt (Canada). This project will be an experiment in dissolving the boundaries that separate audiences: geographically, culturally and spatially. Chiasma will utilize chat interfaces and live web streaming technology to investigate the potential for audience interaction with live art on the net. It will also be an exploration of urban spaces and the potential for contact with new and unsuspecting audiences through projecting live web events into public spaces.

Geographical: This project will use internet technologies to aid audiences and artists in overcoming geographical boundaries. Anyone worldwide can take part by simply logging on from an internet access point. The online communication intends to encourage exchange and communication with a global community of artists, arts practitioners and those interested in or curious about live art.

Cultural: Chiasma will attempt to transcend the traditional gallery / live art audience by stimulating the attention and interaction of passers-by in the cityscape and internet surfers on the web. Everyone from the curious newcomer to the dedicated enthusiast can log in and watch the live art events unfold on the screen of a PC. They can opt to comment on the performance by using the chat interface running alongside the live image, or they can say nothing and simply be a quiet observer.

The public projections of these online performances in city centers will also engage the unsuspecting pedestrian as s/he walks past. The aim is to evoke curiosity and to draw in people to the artistic dialogue that may not otherwise have taken part. The aim is to visually attract individuals to what is taking place and to make URL information available to them so that s/he will log on and participate in the event on the net. This objective is focused on breaking down the barriers to inclusivity that still dominate the constitution of art audiences, even for the most accessible projects. One of the main factors of exclusivity is in the cultural habitus of the art audience members themselves; by ‘placing’ the live art in ‘unusual’ settings, the project looks to engage with potential audiences who do not necessarily have the same background or knowledge of the medium that most regular art audience members have acquired.

Spatial: This project will investigate the interplay of the physical / virtual performance spaces and how proximity and location affects the experience of an artistic event. Although the audiences in this project will be somewhat limited by the fact that they will not be in the same physical space as the performer while s/he performs (thus potentially losing out on the ability to adjust lines of vision) this project will investigate the potential gains of entering a virtual environment. With the existence of a chat interface running along side of the performance image on screen, audience members are given a voice: allowed to be vocal, to interact, interject and enquire in a form that is disallowed by the ‘normal’, self-imposed restrictions of the gallery space.

Project Background

In October of 2001, Folly (UK) collaborated with Grunt (Canada) to host a live web transmission of Hester Reeve’s performance “2001: Space Odyssey, An Excavation of Truth” as a part of the Vancouver Biennial of Live Art (www.livevancouver.bc.ca). This experience raised questions for curators in both organizations: is there a future for curating live art, specifically intended for

the net and net audiences? What is the potential for reaching new audiences through this medium?

Structure of Project:

Chiasma will consist of two participating arts organizations: Folly (UK) and Grunt (Canada). Each organization will commission a lead artist currently practicing in live arts. The project will be divided into five separate stages:

1. Internet Chat Room Discussion:

At the beginning of the project, the two appointed artists will come together in an online chat room environment, each helping to chair an open forum of discussion and debate on current trends in performance / live arts. This forum will be open to artists and members of the general public from both countries.

2. Artists' Research Period:

The artists will then be asked to go away for a month to create a piece of work responding to this online dialogue, potentially engaging with the following questions: what kind of 'journey' is involved with virtual performance; where to and how does the body of the performer orient itself, temporally and spatially in the 'time' of the performance? How does the knowledge that his/her body is being projected onto the net and into a different country affect the artists' use of his/her body while performing? What does it mean to lack a physical audience but to gain a virtual /interactive audience?

3. Live Web Streamed Event:

The artist will perform in his /her host venue, but not to an open audience. If individuals wish to experience the performance, they will have to log on and watch the live web cast. A text dialogue box will run alongside of the online performance, encouraging discussion while the performance is taking place. The participants from the initial online discussion forum will be encouraged to log on and experience / comment upon the physical (virtual) results.

4. Cityscape Projection:

This performance will also be simultaneously broadcast in a public space during the online transmission: for example, the performance occurring in Vancouver will be scheduled to coincide with British time zones. The Canadian performance will then be streamed both onto the web and projected into an English cityscape: in particular, onto the Lancaster City Museum buildings.

The projected performance will present the spectator with the virtual artists' body, interacting with concrete, physical space – yet from a different dimension, location and time zone.

This public projection will also literally be transporting a Canadian artist into a British space and a British artist into a Canadian space. Opening up the potential for these artists to engage with new audiences and to play with the role of the cityscape and the notion of 'journey' in their performances.